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SCIENCE.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17, 1884.

COMMENT AND CRITICISM.

WE publish this week a chart of the circum-polar regions, showing the thirteen northern stations selected by the international commission for simultaneous observation in magnetic and meteorological phenomena, together with a brief statement of the work done at each. That fifteen arctic expeditions, comprising not less than two hundred men in all, should be sent out and return without loss of life attributable to the peculiar climate or conditions of the arctic regions, except in the one case where succor had not been provided as directed and expected, offers a suggestive lesson to those who, without examining the subject, are inveighing against the dangers of arctic research.

As the outcome of sexual selection, blue eyes are to disappear, at least from Europe. So predicts Mr. Alphonse de Candolle, in his paper on heredity in the color of the eyes in the human species, recently published in the *Archives des sciences*. In investigating the subject of heredity, it occurred to De Candolle that the color of the iris offered the best outward and visible sign. It is conspicuous; it cannot be masked by artifice; after early childhood it does not vary with age, as does the color of the hair; and the character is, on the whole, distinct. For, according to him, there are only two sorts, — black, or rather brown eyes, and blue; gray eyes being reckoned as mere varieties of the blue. From the working-up of the statistics, in part from series of observations made for the purpose, it appears, that, when both parents have eyes of the same color, 88.4 % of the children follow their parents in this feature; and, of the 11.6 % of children born with eyes of other than the parental color, a part must be attributed to atavism, that is, to intermittent heredity.

But the curious fact comes out, that more females than males have black or brown eyes, in the proportion, say, of 49 to 45 or of 41 to 39. Next it appears, that, with different-colored eyes in the two parents, 53.9 % of the progeny followed the fathers in being dark-eyed, and 55.9 % followed their mothers in being dark-eyed. An increase of 5 % of dark-eyed in each generation of discoloured unions must tell heavily in the course of time. It would seem, that, unless specially bred by concolorous marriages, blue-eyed belles will be scarce in the millennium.

ARROPUS of the Bernhard Maimon collection of oriental antiquities, and of the Wolfe expedition to Chaldaea, it is instructive to note the growth of interest in Semitic study in America. The Semitic summer schools, under the inspiration of Dr. Harper and his co-laborers, attract from a hundred to a hundred and fifty students each year, chiefly, of course, for the study of Hebrew. The fact that Hebrew has been studied almost exclusively by candidates for the ministry has caused the language to be regarded as having only theological significance, and has obscured its scientific value. In some American institutions a change has taken place. At Harvard and at Johns Hopkins universities the chief interest in Semitic studies is intended to be a scientific interest. It is still true that most students who elect Hebrew expect to become ministers, but this is not the case with the kindred languages.

THE remarks made in the Electrical conference at Philadelphia by Mr. Preece, the superintendent of the British postal telegraph and telephone system, upon storage-batteries, were especially interesting, both from his account of his successful use of the original Planté form in lighting his own residence, and from the refreshing frankness of his introductory remarks, in which he stated that there had

been more lying about storage-batteries in general, during the last few years, than about any other commercial scheme before the public. Thus far, these batteries do not appear very prominently in this country. In view of the novelty and importance of the subject, both scientifically and commercially, it is to be hoped that the competing systems may be submitted to thorough tests by the boards of examiners of electrical exhibitions.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

*** Correspondents are requested to be as brief as possible. The writer's name is in all cases required as proof of good faith.*

Minerals near Philadelphia.

PERMIT me to call Philadelphia mineralogists' attention to a new locality for garnets and green muscovite. The garnets are found in a small quarry of talcose rock, about one mile below Lafayette station, on the Pennsylvania and Susquehanna valley railroad. The quarry is a short distance below the soapstone quarry, and on the edge of a small stream. The garnets are very fine in color and shape. Green muscovite occurs plentifully a few hundred feet below the garnets in the side of the railway-cut.

JOSEPH T. MEEHAN.

Philadelphia, Oct. 6.

The Delaware estuary.

In your notice (No. 86) of the 'Estuary of the Delaware,' you erred in the authority for the surveys. The hydrography upon which the study was based was executed by H. L. Marindin, Lieut. H. B. Mansfield, and Lieut. E. B. Thomas, assistants in the coast and geodetic survey.

J. A. SULLIVAN.

Boston, Sept. 27.

[We thank our correspondent for calling our attention to what was an accidental omission in our notice of the recent report of the coast-survey study of the 'Estuary of the Delaware.' — ED.]

American pearls.

I beg leave to ask the assistance of the readers of *Science* in gaining information regarding the finding of American pearls in either fresh or salt water; also the weight, color, lustre, and value of the same, with the name of the mollusk in which they were found, and date of finding.

A preliminary paper on this subject was read at the Philadelphia meeting of the American association. The paper will be published in full by the U. S. fish-commission. Due credit will be given for any information.

GEORGE F. KUNZ.

With Tiffany & Co., New York, Oct. 6.

A wider use for scientific libraries.

I noticed in the last number of *Science* a proposition to render the libraries of the various scientific societies more useful by circulating the books somewhat by mail, among persons located in small towns.

If those having charge of those libraries knew what

a blessed boon such an arrangement would be to a man situated as I have been for a few years, I am sure they would heartily second the proposition. Colleges are often located in small towns, and are very poorly supplied with the means for scientific study or investigation. Professors in such institutions would be delighted with any arrangement, not involving *very great* expense, which would give them access in any way during term-time to a good scientific library. Would not some such arrangement as this be a wise one? — Require a person wishing for the privilege of taking books from the library to give bond for a sum sufficient to meet all possible liabilities, and charge to his account all the actual expenses incident to packing and mailing or expressing books to him, and also any books not returned. Charge him, also, a small annual fee for the use of the books. In that case, he would pay only the actual expenses, and for the use of the books.

I earnestly hope our scientific societies may consider this question, and give to those of us who are isolated from the rest of the world, in small colleges and small towns, the benefit of the wealth of learning idly hoarded up in their libraries.

W. Z. BENNETT.

Wooster, Wayne county, O.,
Oct. 7.

Systematic earthquake observation.

The mention of my name in several recent articles in your columns and elsewhere may excuse the seeming egotism of the proposal which is the object of this letter.

I am much interested in the recent suggestions of *Science* looking toward the closer intercourse of those who are interested in practical seismology. We have not in the United States, at least in the eastern part, any such promising field for observational work as that occupied by the Seismological society of Japan; and the number of persons at present interested in the study is not large, perhaps too small to make advisable the formal organization of a seismological society. But my records, kept now for a dozen years, make it quite evident that earthquakes, even on the Atlantic seaboard, are by no means such infrequent phenomena as is generally supposed; and I am convinced that systematic instrumental observation would largely increase the number by the detection of minor shocks and tremors which now pass entirely unrecognized and unsuspected.

As to the second point, also, it is quite probable there may be more persons interested in the subject, and willing to do some work for it, than are known to me. In the effort to find out the number and the names of such persons, I am quite willing to serve as the medium of communication for the present; and I would therefore venture to suggest that all such persons communicate with me, either through your columns or by mail directly, with the view of ascertaining whether we are sufficiently numerous to make concerted observational work possible and desirable.

C. G. ROCKWOOD, jun.

Princeton, N.J., Oct. 10.

The prime meridian.

Permit me to add to your remarks in No. 88 of *Science*, concerning the present confusion resulting from too many initial meridians, a few facts from a recent German periodical. The 'nautical almanacs' published by England, Germany, France, and the United States, refer, in part at least, to the meridians